

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

GENESIS 2:7-17

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). On the Sixth Day, God made man, that is human beings, in His own image (Gen. 1:26). We get a close-up view of that event in today's Old Testament lesson, where Moses records that "the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature" (Gen. 2:7). This account of man's origin seems rather silly to our modern way of thinking, fit for Sunday School, but not to be regarded as an actual fact. Yet although it is a simple story, it is not at all unbelievable, since behind it stands an Almighty, all-powerful God. (As we heard Pastor McGuire sing from the pulpit recently, "There's nothing my God cannot do.")

But not only did God make Adam, and later, Eve; we confess in the words of Luther's Small Catechism, "I believe that God has made *me*." We may not have been formed of dust from the ground, as Adam was, but we are no less creatures of God. "For You formed my inward parts," writes David in the Psalms, "You knitted me together in my mother's womb" (Ps. 139:13-14). You are no accident, the result of random chance. You were made on purpose by the same God who planned and constructed the universe. Your life is a gift from Him, for every good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights (Jas. 1:17). Your life has meaning and purpose. It is precious to God, who not only forbids the taking of human life, with very few exceptions, but has sent forth His Son Jesus Christ into human flesh in order to save our lives for eternity; and not in some disembodied sense, but the Scriptures say that on the Last Day He will raise us *physically* from the dead, and give eternal life to all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.

But our text goes on. It does not stop with the creation of man, but look at all that God provides for his human creatures: "And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Gen. 2:8-9a). It goes on to describe a river that flowed out of Eden to water the garden, the gold and precious stones of that land, and the task of working and keeping the garden that the LORD God gave to the man. As creatures, there are certain basic necessities we need to nourish and support our life on earth: food and drink to give us energy, health, and joy; clothing and shoes for protection and for modesty; house and home for shelter, security, and hospitality; families and friends to help us bear one another's burdens; work and livelihood. And God Himself provides these necessities for

us, as He does for all His creatures. Perhaps you're familiar with Luther's mealtime prayer, which begins, "The eyes of all look to You, O Lord, and You give them their food at the proper time. You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing" (Ps. 145:15-16). That includes His entire nonhuman creation as well as all people, even those who fail to acknowledge Him. "For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). And in this way, He leaves Himself a witness (Acts 14:17).

So, God is not like some great clockmaker, who winds up the universe and lets it go, leaving it behind to run on its own, abandoned by its Creator, but the God who made us *still takes care of us*. He is present and active within His creation, constantly looking after it and creating new life within it. "Do I not fill heaven and earth," declares the LORD through His prophet Jeremiah (23:24). "In His hand is the life of every living thing," says a lamenting Job (12:10). And the author of Hebrews writes, "He [the Son] upholds the universe by the word of His power" (1:3). Our God is a God at hand, and not a God far away. His never-failing providence orders all things both in heaven and on earth, giving those things that are profitable for us.

Which does beg the question: If our gracious Creator provides for all of our needs, then why do suffering and death exist in the world? The world today is not like it was in the beginning. God's creation is good, but it is no longer perfect. It has, in the words of Paul, been "subjected to futility," enslaved to corruption (Rom. 8:21).

And the reason is hinted at in today's text. Included in the description of "every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" are the tree of life in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of which God says, "you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). We're not told *why* this particular tree was off limits, only that it was, because God said so. The man and his wife knew this, even quoting the prohibition to the devil in chapter 3, and yet they chose to disobey anyway. It is this sinful act of rebellion that brought evil and suffering into the world. "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23a). That is the fruit, the due consequence, of trespassing God's law. And as sin came into the world through one man, so death spread to all men (all people) because all sinned (Rom. 5:12).

We also read that God punished human rebellion by cursing the earth: "Cursed is the ground because of you," He says in chapter 3 (v. 17). So, even though the earth sustains life, God's judgment may also be seen in things like storms, pests, earthquakes, and diseases.

So what are we to do? Is a return to Eden possible? Yes, but only through repentance and faith. Sin and its consequences are our problem, and we're not going to

get off the hook by saying, “It’s Adam’s fault,” or, “The devil made me do it.” We need to accept responsibility for what’s happened. This is our fault, and ours alone.

But God still cares for His creation. He’s not about to throw away His hard work, not even His sinful human creatures. God’s in the business of *restoring* that which has fallen into disrepair. He takes one look at us and says, “I can work with that.” So we see Christ have compassion on those who were suffering in today’s Gospel lesson (Mk. 8:2). He fed them until they were satisfied. And from there He went to the cross to make satisfaction for sin. God, who had already provided all that we need to support this body and life, gave one more thing, the thing we needed most: a Savior. God may have cursed the ground, but in the same breath He also promised a devil-stomping, sin-absolving, death-destroying Hero, who would come to our rescue. He hinted at it again in the well-known story of the sacrifice of Isaac, putting on the lips of Abraham, “God will provide for Himself a lamb for the offering” (Gen. 22:8).

And that Lamb has been provided: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). On the cross, Jesus took all of our suffering into Himself. By His death, He overcomes our suffering and death. And in His resurrection from the dead, Christ gives eternal life to all who trust in Him. “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

And when Jesus returns, God will free us, His children, from all suffering, along with the entire creation. “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor drying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). What will there be? A new heaven and a new earth, a new Eden, in which God will richly and daily provide us with all that we need to support our bodies and lives for eternity. Already, we have a foretaste of that life to come here in the Lord’s Supper, God providing us with the true body and blood of His Son for our forgiveness. Take, eat; take, drink; be strengthened for the work to which God has called you, and in faith to life everlasting.

In ✠ Jesus’ name. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why is the record of man’s creation in Genesis 2:7 believable?
2. What does it mean to confess that “God made me”?
3. How does God still take care of you?
4. Why do suffering and death exist in the world?
5. Is a return to Eden possible?

